

FOR PETE'S SAKE

After tackling fearsome dinosaurs in last year's *Jurassic World*, taking on a fluffy dragon named Elliot in Disney's *Pete's Dragon* was a walk in the park for Bryce Dallas Howard.

Words: Gill Pringle

"My sister and I grew up on the original *Pete's Dragon*," says Bryce Dallas Howard, describing how the 1977 partially-animated Disney movie played "on a loop" during her childhood.

Wrapping her head around the fact that this new Elliot would be unlike the typical scaly-skinned dragons, Howard swiftly caught on.

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"David [Lowery, director] told me from the start that this would be a really friendly dinosaur, so I imagined Elliot like my childhood dog, Littlefoot, a golden retriever named after Littlefoot in *Land Before Time*, who was just my best friend! She actually saved my brother, pulling him out of a

snowdrift," she says.

When Lowery outlined his new take on *Pete's Dragon*, a film that talks about loneliness, friendship and the meaning of family, he had Howard at Elliot's first fiery breath.

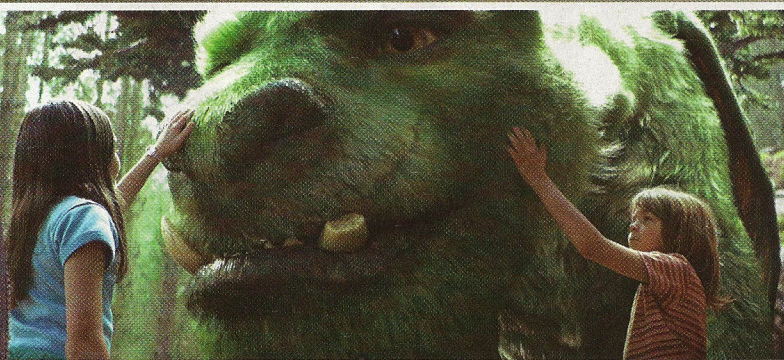
"Family means everything to me. I am fiercely protective of my own children," says the actress, who has two kids with actor husband Seth Gabel.

Filming *Pete's Dragon* in New Zealand for six months, she recalls, "I realised this would be a wonderful experience to share with my family, and they went to school in New Zealand and we lived in a tiny house, all of us on top of each other."

Of co-starring with Kivi national treasure Karl Urban, who plays the villain of the piece, she says, "We all fell in love with New Zealand and were like, 'We want to move here!' And Karl was a great example of how to live in a place that is, on the map, so isolated, and yet he's still able to function in this industry and have a family and all that. For all of us, it was always twenty questions for Karl, like 'Soooo... Where do you live here? How do you do it?'"

Although Howard, 35, grew up around Hollywood royalty, she admits to being nervous about meeting Robert Redford, who plays her father in the film.

"The first time we met was while we





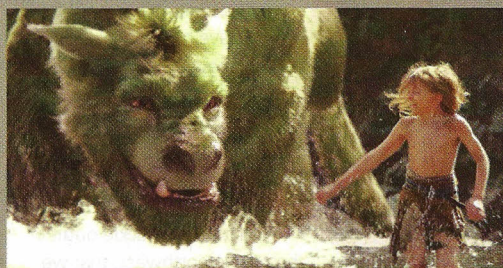
were shooting, doing a scene where we're running towards each other on a long empty road in an emotional reunion. But I hadn't actually met him yet. I knew he was at the other end, and I was very far away from set. And when David yelled 'action', and we were running towards each other, I picked up speed because I was really excited, and I totally barreled into him! And he's a really sturdy, strong guy, so he took the hit, like the man he is, and then David yelled 'cut' and Robert says to me, 'You came at me like a cannonball!' And I was like, 'Sorry! Nice to meet you!'

Howard has endless Redford anecdotes and how the *Horse Whisperer* star actually rescued an abused horse wandering in the forest near the *Pete's Dragon* set. However, no meeting with the actress would be complete with asking her about *Jurassic World 2*, set to begin shooting next year.

"I think the safest, most professional thing to do is to not say anything unless it is said before I say it," she laughs, only revealing that she will abandon her high heels in the sequel, and zipping her lips when quizzed about the rumours of 'pet' dinosaurs.

"We probably shouldn't go further than this! Because you're leaning up against some things that I'm like, 'aaahhh don't make an expression!'"

➔ *Pete's Dragon* is in cinemas on September 15



DRAGON DIRECTOR

A throwback family film set in a world uncluttered by internet and cell phones, David Lowery's *Pete's Dragon* is unapologetically sweet but never sappy.

If Disney had wanted sappy, then Lowery – best known for his 2013 R-rated crime drama *Ain't Them Bodies Saints* – would doubtless be at the bottom of the studio's wish-list.

"Regardless of the type of movie I am making, my endeavour is always to make things that matter, that have an effect and will last," Lowery tells *STACK*. "There's an integrity that I strive for so, in my pitch for *Pete's Dragon*, [Disney] recognised my attempt to make a solid movie that had classic, old-fashioned storytelling and, at the same time, a very distinct point of view.

"From the first moment I met with them, I think they realised this isn't someone who's going to try to reinvent the wheel. I wanted to do a classic story of a boy and a dragon. I wasn't about making a weird, artsy Disney movie," he adds, citing Jon Favreau's *The Jungle Book* as inspiration, along with Bill Condon's upcoming *Beauty and the Beast* and what Alex Ross Perry might potentially do with *Winnie the Pooh*.

"These are filmmakers who have made films in the past that you may say are subversive, but they all have integrity to them, and they bring that integrity and point of view to these classic Disney tales. Disney are making great movies right now. And redefining what a Walt Disney picture is in a very definite way, and that is to tell old stories in a new way. It's a smart thing to do, and I think they responded to my take on this."

Lowery then unabashedly admits to basing his unusually furry dragon on his own cats, whipping out his phone to eagerly show *STACK* snaps of his own regal felines, Biggie and Tupac.